



Coconino County Common Snow Plow Questions/Concerns

I didn't know it snows so much in northern Arizona. Is this normal?

According to the National Climatic Data Center, Flagstaff is the eighth snowiest city in the 48 contiguous states, with a 30-year average annual snowfall of over 100 inches.

Why do the snow plow operators leave a berm at the end of my driveway?

When snow is removed from a roadway, the snow plow operator piles it as far as possible off the shoulder of the road, into the County's right-of-way. This is done to make room for additional snow from the next snow storm.

The County's right-of-way typically extends 30 feet out from the center of the road, and may include a portion of your driveway where it connects to the street. Our motor graders have right-hand snow wings, which cannot be rotated. To avoid placing a berm across the end of your driveway, our drivers would need to angle the blade at each driveway, which would cause a delay in snow removal and put some snow back onto the road. This would significantly increase the time required for snow removal. While we regret this inconvenience, our primary responsibility is to provide safe and reliable roadways for all who use County roads, including fire trucks, ambulances and law enforcement vehicles.

Why can't the snow plow operators put the snow in the center of the road to avoid berms in our driveway?

If minimum-width traffic lanes are to be kept open, there is not enough room in the center of the roads for snow. Roads need to be cleared for emergency vehicle access, and narrow roads already limit their access.

Placing snow in the center of the roadway would also create a number of liability and maintenance issues for the County:

- It would be difficult to make left turns across the center berm.
- Streets are designed to drain to the curb line so the snow needs to be pushed to these curb lines. Snow melting in the middle of the road would create icy conditions as the water runs toward the edges of the road.
- Snow in the center of the road would also create asphalt deterioration due to the constant freezing and thawing.

In addition, hauling the snow off the road would be an enormous cost to the County. The County maintains 1,032 miles of road. The City of Flagstaff calculated their cost of hauling snow to be \$5,528 per one lane mile for every 9 inches of snowfall.

Can the County's snow plow operator plow my driveway or berm if I am elderly, disabled or not physically able to shovel?

Unfortunately, the County Public Works Department does not have the resources to plow the driveways and/or berms of those who are unable to do so. Our primary goal is to use the resources we have to provide safe and

reliable roadways in the most efficient manner possible. We encourage those who are not able to shovel to ask neighbors for assistance or hire a private snow plow service.

How is road maintenance and snow plowing funded?

Funding for County maintained roads is not derived from property taxes. Road maintenance is funded by the State Highway User Revenue Fund (HURF), which is generated from the gasoline tax. The State Legislature allocates these funds to the Arizona Department of Transportation, and Arizona cities and counties, using a mandated formula. In addition, HURF has been down 12% from previous years (now at 1999 levels). Over the last four years Coconino County has been required to provide the State approximately \$2 million of our HURF share to help balance the State budget deficit. We anticipate this may continue into the future as well.

I understand the County does not maintain or plow my private road. What steps can be taken to change this?

Coconino County is governed by State statutes that determine how public funds are to be spent on roadways. State Statute 28-6705 identifies what is necessary in order for a road to qualify to have public funds spent on road maintenance. If the road in question is not currently in the Coconino County road maintenance system, and has not been accepted by the Board of Supervisors for maintenance, the road must be laid out, constructed, and completed in full accordance with standard engineering road specifications adopted by the County Board of Supervisors. When these conditions are met, the road may be considered for acceptance into the County system.

One method provided by State statute to bring a roadway up to the County's engineering standards, and to become eligible for publicly funded maintenance, is to form a Road Improvement District. The basic requirement for formation of such a district is that an agreement to incur the necessary expenses must be reached by more than one-half of the property owners **or** owners of more than one-half of the property within the limits of the proposed district. Each parcel will then be assessed a share of the costs, based upon the benefits received. For details on road improvement districts, contact Special Initiatives, Elaine Beyal at (928) 679-7165, or email elbeyal@coconino.az.gov.

Are there other sources for snow removal?

If you have a homeowners association (HOA), the management can contract with a private snow plow service provider, who can be paid through your HOA dues. If you do not have an HOA, you and your neighbors can hire a private service and split the bill among yourselves or, if you have a neighbor with a truck, you can all contribute to the purchase (or rental) of a plow for them to use to plow your road.

I live on a County maintained road. Why does it take so long for my road to get plowed?

The County's snow plow program is prioritized on a "greatest impact" basis. The main roads (arterials) are plowed first, followed by collector and residential streets. This allows citizens some mobility within the community and keeps emergency services as open as possible. Once these routes are accessible, side streets and cul-de-sacs are plowed. With quick and heavy snowfall, it may be necessary for the snow plow to remain on the arterial and collector roads for longer periods of time to keep up with the snow, which can cause a significant delay in getting to the residential streets. Also, your road may get plowed in the middle of the night and, when you wake up in the morning, more snow may have accumulated.

The snow plow sometimes hits my mailbox, or I can't get my mail because the snow berm is blocking access to my mailbox. Why does this happen?

Again, the County's right-of-way often extends 30 feet out from the center of the road. To prepare for additional snow from the next storm, the snow plow operator pushes the snow as far off the road (and into the County right-of-way) as possible. In the process, if mailboxes are located in the right-of-way, and the operator does not see them, they may get hit. County residents are responsible for shoveling around their mailbox, which helps the operator identify the location of the box. If your mailbox gets hit by the plow, call the Public Works Department at (928) 679-8300.

We suggest you place the metal post for your mailbox behind the ditch line, off the road, and install an arm that extends out to the road with the box on it. Per federal postal guidelines, the box should be at a vertical height of between 41-45 inches from the road surface. With a height of 45 inches, the snow plow operator may be able to plow under your box and your mail delivery person will have easier access to your mailbox.

The County appreciates residents **not** building anything, including fences, or landscaping in the County's right-of-way, and keeping a minimum of 10 feet clear from the edge of the road. If you must build in the County's right-of-way, contact the Public Works Department for an encroachment permit—to ensure that proper standards are met.

Why can't I park on County maintained roads in the winter?

Coconino County adopted Ordinance 86-6, which prohibits parking on county roadways between November 1 and April 1 on a 24-hour basis. All motor vehicles should be kept clear of the streets to expedite snow removal operations and prevent damage to County snow plows or private vehicles. When a County snow plow encounters a vehicle parked illegally within the right of way, the Sheriff's Department is contacted. An attempt to notify the owner will be made; however, the vehicle may be towed if the owner cannot be contacted.

How far off the road do I need to park my car in my driveway?

Ideally, the snow plow operator needs at least 10 feet to be clear on the side of the road. Anything less can cause a delay in snow plowing, possible damage to the vehicle, and/or risk of injury. If the operator hits a vehicle parked in the driveway (yet too close to the road), the operator is instructed to stop immediately and call their Supervisor and a Sheriff's Deputy, who will take a report at the scene. The operator is given a mandatory drug test, and it can take 5-10 days to get the results. Meanwhile, the community has one less snow plow operator.

What if it snows on trash day?

It would be helpful if residents pull their trash cans in soon after trash is picked up or when they get home from work.

When do the snow plows get deployed and how long are they out?

Our Road Maintenance Supervisors monitor the weather through the internet and National Weather Service. If inclement weather is forecasted, a **snow removal crew** is activated to monitor and observe the actual conditions. If there is a high probability that a storm will hit within the County, a **base crew** will be mobilized. When snow starts falling, as observed by the patrol or base crew, our **full snow shift** will be deployed. This means we may have approximately 65 snow plow operators on the roads. Crews remain on 12-hour shifts for 24-hour coverage until the storm is over. After the storm, the crews conduct clean-up operations, where they go back and try to push or "wing back" the snow farther off the road to make room for snow from future storms.

Does the County Public Works Department use de-icing chemicals on County roads?

Currently, the County uses de-icing chemicals only on certain roads. The County's de-icing plan contains four phases:

- I – Kochfield Rd, Townsend-Winona Rd, Cosnino Rd, Silver Saddle Rd
- II – Kachina, Mountaineer and Pinewood area
- III- Leupp Rd
- IV- Lake Mary Rd (FH3)

The County is currently in Phase I of the de-icing plan. The product Ice Slicer is used, when necessary, on Townsend Winona Road and hill portions of Kochfield Road, Cosnino Road and Silver Saddle Road. As of this year, we do not plan to go to Phase II due to the rising cost of the chemical and storage challenges.

What if I have an emergency and can't get out of my home?

In the event of an emergency, call **911**. If the Sheriff's Office determines you have a qualifying emergency, a plow will be dispatched to help get you out.

How can residents help during the snow season?

- Prepare for the snow season—get the necessary equipment, including snow shovels, snow blower and tire chains.
- Know what kind of road you live on—city, county, private or public road; and whether your road is an arterial, collector, main residential, cul-de-sac, or residential side street.
- If you live on a private road, get together with neighbors and have a plan for plowing.
- Know what is too much for you. If a big storm is coming and you have a job that requires you to be there, make arrangements to have your driveway and berm plowed by a private contractor. In the event of a heavy snowfall, you may need to have the contractor plow your berm a couple of times in one day to keep up with our plows, which are also trying to keep up with the snowfall.
- If you can, please help your neighbors who are elderly or disabled by shoveling their driveway and berm.
- Respect the County right-of-way boundary by not landscaping or building in it. Leaving at least 10 feet off the side of the road clear for our operators would be helpful. If you must build in the County's right-of-way, contact the Public Works Department for an encroachment permit—to ensure that proper standards are met.
- Do not shovel or plow snow back onto the roadway. It is dangerous and you could be held liable in the event of an accident. Arizona State Statute 13-2906 states that “obstructing a highway or other public thoroughfare is a class 3 misdemeanor”.
- Avoid parking along County roadways between November 1 and April 1. If you park along the roads, you may get towed.
- Try not to take it personally! Our snow plow operators are doing their job and not intentionally trying to create a hardship for you. They also wake up-or come home to-a berm that they have to shovel as well.

What if I have more questions or need more information?

You can contact the Public Works Department at (928)679-8300 or visit our website at <http://www.coconino.az.gov/publicworks>.